Gospel Doctrine **Matthew 2, Luke 2**
Karl Diether **Next Week**
January 21, 2007 **Matthew 3-4, John 1:35-51**

Harmonization

- A Few thoughts on harmonization as reflected in our annual family Christmas pageant.

Matthew: Background

- I haven't had a chance to talk about background issues for Matthew yet. I will discuss background issues for Luke in a later lesson because I won't make it to Luke today.
- ***Date of Composition:*** 70-100[1]
- ***Author:***
  - *Tradition:* Matthew, a tax-collector and member of the twelve. Eusebius attributes the following to Papias (a second century Bishop): "Now Matthew made an ordered arrangement of the oracles in the Hebrew [or Aramaic] language and each translated [or interpreted] it as he was able."[2]
  - *Modern Scholarship:* Most scholars don't believe the traditional attribution is correct. First, the gospel of Matthew is most likely not a translation in Greek from Hebrew or Aramaic; it was probably originally written in Greek. It is also improbable that a Hebrew (or Aramaic) original would quote so much from Mark (see Lesson 2 notes).[3] Maybe Papias' statement actually refers to a gospel now lost to us and/or a gospel written by the apostle Matthew that was an important source for the author of our present Matthean gospel. Most scholars do believe the author was Jewish (e.g., his use of gemetria is a strong piece of evidence in favor of Jewishness).
- ***Place of Origin:*** The most often suggested place I have read is Antioch in Syria.

The Magi and King Herod

- Read Matthew 2:1-8:

> **(1)** Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, **(2)** Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. **(3)** When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. **(4)** And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. **(5)** And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the

[1] Brown, Raymond E., 1997 *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Doubleday, 117.
[2] Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 844.
[3] Barton, John, and John Muddiman (Editors), 2001, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, Oxford University Press, 844.

prophet, **(6)** And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. **(7)** Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. **(8)** And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

- King Herod ruled from 37-4 BCE. This places the birth of Jesus at 4 BCE or a earlier. Note, the reference to Herod's son Archelaus (also called Herod) ruling after King Herod in verse 21 really nails down the reference to Herod the Great. Herod was not an independent King; he was a client King to Caesar Augustus (the first Roman Emperor).[4]

- *The Magi play a very prominent role here. Why does Matthew include the story involving the Magi? Clearly, you can tell the story of Jesus without mentioning them since neither Luke or Mark mention them at all. What does Matthew want us to learn from the Magi?*

- Of course, one possibility is that Matthew knew about the Magi visiting and the others did not. Let's move beyond that explanation and think about what Matthew wants to teach us about Jesus via the story involving the Magi.

- *One important attribute of the Magi is that they are foreigners (gentiles). Why would Matthew include a story from the infancy of Jesus that involves foreigners? Who do the Magi contrast with?*
  - I think Matthew wants the reader to understand the scope of Jesus' message. Matthew clearly identifies Jesus as the Jewish Messiah: There are "Son of David" references in chapter one and Jesus birth in Bethlehem of Judaea is clear reference to his Davidic lineage. However, he also reminds the reader (or originally the hearer) that Jesus and his message have a much bigger scope. The Magi are an important reminder of this universal (all nations) scope.
  - The Magi provide contrast with Herod personally and the Jewish leadership more generally. The Magi accept what Herod (the Jewish leadership) is unwilling to do despite the fact that he has the scriptures. I think it is important to note that Matthew isn't condemning Jews in general; his condemnation is focused on the Jewish leadership (this is true throughout the gospel). The Magi proclaim that Jesus is the "King of the Jews." *Does this contrast ever show up again the gospel of Matthew? Is it a theme?*
  - I think it shows up in some form throughout the gospel of Matthew. However, Let's think about the end of the gospel of Matthew: the trial and crucification. *How does this same contrast show up there? Are there other similarities?*
  - ***Comparison Between the Birth and Crucification Narrative***
    - Pilot (the gentile) believes Jesus to at least be innocent in the crucification narrative. The Roman Soldiers (gentiles) ironically proclaim "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." (Matthew 27.)
    - The Jewish leadership, on the other hand, refuses to accept Jesus as the Messiah.

[4] Coogan, Michael D. (Editor), 2001, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, Oxford University Press, 10.

    - Both narratives reflect secret plotting by the Jewish leadership.
    - Heavenly signs: star (birth) and darkness (death).

- *Is there anything ironic about the Magi's acceptance of Jesus as King of the Jews, and the Jewish leaderships refusal to accept him?*
    - It seems to me that the Magi use of Star for guidance is being contrasted with the Jewish leaderships use of scriptures. *If this is the case then what does the star represent?*
    - *Do these verses tell us anything about the role of scripture? Does it tell us anything about the role of revelation? How about their joint role?*

- *Why do the Magi even visit Herod? why not follow the star straight to Jesus? Why do the Magi need Herod's help? Does that clarify anything about the roles of scripture and revelation?*

- *When you think of Magi, what comes to mind? Do stories in the Old or New Testaments come to mind? Are there similarities between the stories involving the Magi in the Old Testament and Matthew's Magi? Are the Magi usually viewed positively or negatively in the Bible?*

- ***The Magi or Foreign Prophets in Scripture***
    - Moses and the wise men (magicians) at Pharaoh's court (Exodus 7:8-13)
    - Balaam (Number 22-24). Note, although Balaam is never called a magus in the Old Testament it might not have been unusual to refer to him as a magus in the first century. Philo of Alexandria (the 1st century Hellenized Jewish philosopher) referred the Balaam as a magus.[5]
    - The book of Daniel
    - Simon Magus in the Book of Acts (Acts 8:9-24)
    - Elymas of Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6-11)

Balaam and the Magi[6]

- To me the strongest link between Matthew's Magi and the Old Testament is the story of Balaam.

- *In what ways are the Magi like Balaam? Are the two stories similar in some ways?*
    - Balaam does get viewed negatively in Numbers 25. After Balaam's arrival, the Israelite men are seduced into idolatry by the Moabite woman. However, in chapters 22-24 Balaam – at the very least – is receiving true revelations (oracles) from God.
    - Both of the Magi and Balaam are known to come from "the east." Read numbers 23:7:

        > **(7)** And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel.

[5] Brown, Raymond E., 1977, *The Birth of the Messiah*, Doubleday, 190-196

[6] For a nice discussion of the links between Balaam and the Magi see Brown, Raymond E., 1977, *The Birth of the Messiah*, Doubleday, 190-196

Maybe Matthew keeps the origin of the wisemen purposely vague to increase the commonality in the allusion.

- Balaam actually does foil the plans of King Balak; King Balak hopes to use Balaam to curse Israel but Balaam ends up blessing Israel. The parallels with King Herod are pretty strong. Herod tries to use the foreign magi to destroy Jesus (the Hope and true King of Israel) but they bless (bestow gifts) on the infant King.

- The final link between the Balaam and the Magi: Read Number 24:17:

> **(17)** I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

- *What can we learn or what should we learn from the fact that the stories are similar? What can we learn from the fact that the foreign wisemen/prophets have played an important role in both the Old Testament and New Testament?*

- I think it is an example of one Matthew's most important themes: to call the reader's attention to the links between the Old Testament and Jesus. In this case, Matthew is indicating to the reader that taking salvation to the gentiles was not new or accidental. It was planned by God from the beginning (beginning here jointly refers the earthly life of Jesus and the Jewish nation.)

The Star

- Read Matthew 2:9-10:

> **(9)** When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

- This is no ordinary star. Plenty of observers have suggested other astrological phenomenon such as supernovas or comets, but I think such identification (while maybe interesting) misses Matthew's point which in my view is primarily theological: the Magi were guided by God (revelation).

- *Does the role of the star here in Matthew remind you of other instances of divine guidance?*

Fleeing to Egypt

- Read Matthew 2:13-21:

> **(13)** And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. **(14)** When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: **(15)** And was there until the death of Herod: that it might

be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

(16) Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. **(17)** Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, **(18)** In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.

(19) But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, **(20)** Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. **(21)** And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel.

- Is there historical evidence confirming the slaughter of the innocents? No, but that is probably not surprising. If the village of Bethlehem had about 1000 people then male children under 2 years of age would probably not number more than 20 children given the high infant mortality rate of the time.[7] What we know about Herod certainly suggests that he was capable of such a slaughter. For example, "[t]o ensure mourning at his funeral, Herod wanted his soldiers instructed to kill notable political prisoners upon the news of his death. His goals was expressed thus: 'So Shall all Judea and every household weep for me, whether they wish it or not.'"[8]

- *Is the Old Testament an important backdrop for these verses? In what ways does the narrative echo stories or themes in the Old Testament?*
  - Well, the quotation of Hosea 11:1 and Jeremiah 31:15 is an obvious link.
  - Its hard not to think of Moses here.

- *Is the connection between Jesus and Moses unintentional perhaps?*

- Always a possibility but the similarities are not superficial. Matthew seems to explicitly evoke Exodus imagery. Notice, that Matthew only partial quotes from Hosea 11:1:. The full verse reads as follows:

  (1) When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.

- More Moses Jesus parallels: Notice the similarity of language in Exodus 4:19-20:

  (19) And the LORD said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return into Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life. **(20)** And Moses took his wife and his sons, and set them upon an ass, and he returned to the land of Egypt: and Moses took the rod of God in his hand.

  - Brown points out following about the angels' instruction:[9]

[7] Brown, Raymond E., 1977, *The Birth of the Messiah*, Doubleday, 204-205.
[8] Brown, Raymond E., 1977, *The Birth of the Messiah*, Doubleday, 227.
[9] *The Birth of the Messiah*, Doubleday, 217.

> ‘those who were seeking your child’s life are dead’ is almost a verbatim repetition of the Greek form of the Lord’s words to Moses in Exod 4:19, pertaining to the Pharaoh’s death.

- *Is the Moses imagery confined just to these verses or is it pretty constant throughout this chapter and beyond? Think about the first 5 chapters in rough outline.*
- ***Rough Outline of the first 5 chapters of Matthew***[10]
  - A male child is miraculously born.
  - A evil or least pretty bad tyrant rules the land.
  - The child is protected from harm in Egypt.
  - The child leaves Egypt.
  - He passes through the waters (of Baptism).
  - He is tested in the wilderness for 40 units of time.
  - He delivers God’s law on a mountain (mount).
- *Why does Matthew compare (at least implicitly) Jesus with Moses? What does Matthew want us as readers to realize?*

Return to Nazareth

- Read Matthew 2:21-23:

> **(21)** And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. **(22)** But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: **(23)** And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

- *Is settling in Nazareth a change of plans in terms of location? If so, what was the families original plan?*
- *Why do you think the narrative mentions that the family returns to country of Israel, the region of Galilee, and then the city of Nazareth? Why not just say they settled in Nazareth?*

[10]Ehrman, Bart D., 2004, *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, Oxford University Press.